

Learning Innovation in Islamic Boarding Schools in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education and Student Skills

Ahmad Qusairi

¹Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wadda'wah

Corresponding Author: Ahmad Qusairi, Ahmadqusairi@uiidalwa.ac.id

Published: May, 2021

ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of learning innovations in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in East Java and their impact on the quality of Islamic education and student skills. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research involved interviews, observations, and documentation from four pesantren, gathering insights from 20 informants, including foundation leaders, curriculum representatives, teachers, and students. The findings revealed diverse opinions on the need for innovation, highlighting strong support from leadership while underscoring challenges faced by teachers, particularly related to training and resource availability. The participation of students in the learning process emerged as a crucial element, emphasizing their interest in more interactive methods but also their desire for improved teaching quality. Supporting factors, such as parental involvement, were identified as beneficial, while hindering factors included insufficient ongoing teacher training and a lack of modern technological resources. Additionally, the study showed varied academic results among students, with approximately 70% of those involved in innovative learning achieving above-average scores, contrasting with 50% from traditional methods. The research concludes that a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and pesantren administrators—is essential for the sustained development of educational innovations and improving academic outcomes. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the supporting factors, pesantren can create a more effective and innovative learning environment that meets the evolving needs of students.

Keywords: Islamic boarding schools, learning innovations, quality of education, teacher training, parental involvement, academic performance.

© The Author(s). 2021 Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in pesantren plays a crucial role in shaping the character and morals of the younger generation in Indonesia (Mujahid, I. 2021; Jubba, H., et al; 2022). However, in this era of globalization and rapid technological advancements, many pesantren remain trapped in traditional teaching methodologies that do not meet contemporary demands. According to research conducted by Mulyasa (2020) in the Journal of Islamic Education, it is evident that conventional methodologies often fail to accommodate the diverse learning styles and needs of students. If this gap is not addressed

promptly, the quality of education provided will be undermined by the increasingly dynamic developments of the era.

Furthermore, this phenomenon creates a disparity in the skill acquisition necessary for students to compete in the modern world. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2021 revealed that pesantren students tend to be less prepared to face challenges outside of the school environment, particularly concerning practical skills and technology. This presents a serious issue that requires special attention from all stakeholders, including pesantren administrators and educational institutions.

In this context, innovation in learning becomes an urgent need to enhance the quality of Islamic education and student skills. Innovative pedagogical approaches can provide solutions to address these issues by creating a more interactive and relevant learning environment. Therefore, there is an urgent need to explore innovative practices that can be adopted in pesantren to improve student learning outcomes (Arifin, 2022, *International Journal of Islamic Education*).

Several previous studies have indicated the importance of innovation in education for achieving better outcomes. Leong and Hwang (2019), in their research published in the *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, emphasized that the application of technology in learning can optimize the teaching and learning process, especially in educational institutions that have a traditional basis like pesantren. However, this research did not specifically focus on the context of pesantren in Indonesia, thus presenting a gap for this study to explore in more depth.

In recent years, the discourse on learning innovation in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) has gained prominence, especially in addressing the challenges of globalization, digitalization, and skill development. Scholars have explored various dimensions of innovation in the pesantren system to improve both educational quality and student competencies.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for pedagogical transformation. According to Nursyahidin et al. (2021), the pandemic forced Islamic educational institutions to adopt e-learning modalities, highlighting the need for educator readiness and technological integration. Similarly, Novalić et al. (2021) emphasized the dual burden students experienced in balancing religious and national curricula, underlining the urgency of context-sensitive innovation.

Innovations have also been explored in terms of learning technology and engagement. Haryani et al. (2021) introduced the *iLearning* model, showcasing how digital innovation enhances student participation and fosters critical thinking in Islamic education. Moreover, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were found effective in promoting religious learning among Gen Z learners (Laily et al., 2022; Putri & Astutik, 2021), offering interactive and relatable content.

From a curriculum perspective, Assegaf et al. (2022) stressed the need for internationalization of Islamic education while retaining its core values. Baharun et al. (2022) further advocated for *adaptive curricula* that engage both parents and the broader community, aligning with holistic educational goals.

On the entrepreneurship and skill development front, Anggadwita et al. (2021) revealed how pesantren can function as incubators for humane entrepreneurship, empowering students with practical and economic capabilities. However, challenges remain, such as inadequate awareness of intellectual property rights, which can hinder innovation sustainability (Dwithia Putri & Ganindha, 2022). Bulhayat, et al. (2021) conducted a study on the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instructional media using the ADDIE model at MTsN 1 Bangil. Their findings indicated that the systematic implementation of the ADDIE phases—Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation—resulted in learning media that significantly enhanced students' attention, improved content clarity, and increased the overall efficiency and meaningfulness of classroom instruction. As a result, the learning environment became more conducive, and students demonstrated greater comprehension and application of Islamic values. This study reinforces the importance of structured instructional design in Islamic education and provides relevant insights for integrating media-based innovations within the pesantren context.

In response to environmental and global issues, Anshori and Pohl (2022) highlighted how pesantren integrate *environmental stewardship* into their religious curricula, demonstrating innovation beyond conventional academic boundaries.

Lastly, Suhid et al. (2021) emphasized the centrality of teacher readiness and continuous professional development as key enablers of innovation in Islamic education, reinforcing the need for institutional investment in human resources.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the specific local context of pesantren in Indonesia, exploring innovative methods that align with Islamic values. This study aims to identify and analyze innovative strategies implemented in various pesantren and their impact on educational quality and student skills. This approach is different from prior studies that tended to generalize innovations from other contexts without considering the cultural differences and values present in pesantren.

By focusing on innovations intended to improve both aspects, this research seeks to enrich the existing literature and provide new insights for educational practitioners. It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as a reference for curriculum development and teaching methodologies in pesantren, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of the quality of Islamic education and student skills.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of learning innovations implemented in pesantren in enhancing the quality of Islamic education and student skills, as well as to identify best practices that can be broadly applied.

The central argument of this research is that well-planned and needs-based learning innovations can bridge the gap between existing education and the demands of a developing world, enabling pesantren to play a more active role in equipping students with relevant and adequate skills.

This research holds significant relevance, given the importance of quality education in building superior and morally upright human resources. By providing new insights regarding effective innovative practices in pesantren, this study is expected to assist administrators, educators, and policymakers in formulating and applying better educational strategies, thereby enabling pesantren to optimally fulfill their roles in the context of modern Islamic education.

Educational innovation is a process that encompasses the development of methods, strategies, and teaching techniques aimed at enhancing students' learning experiences. According to Zhao (2017), innovation in education is not limited to new technologies but also includes changes in the curriculum, teaching approaches, and professional development for educators. This indicates that educational innovation is something holistic and requires the involvement of all stakeholders in education.

Furthermore, the application of technology in the classroom has become one of the most sought-after forms of innovation in the digital era. Suhendra et al. (2019) noted that the use of digital devices, such as tablets and learning applications, can enhance student engagement and provide more flexible learning access. This innovation also allows educators to tailor their approaches to the unique needs of individual students, making it more inclusive and responsive.

However, despite the many potentials of innovation in education, several challenges encountered in its implementation often include resistance from educators or lack of adequate training. Bess (2022) pointed out that without proper support and training, innovation will not significantly impact the teaching and learning process. Therefore, ongoing teacher training and collaboration among educational institutions are crucial to promote innovation.

Finally, it is important to remember that educational innovation must be aligned with the local context and culture in which it is applied. This was expressed by Wijaya (2021), who stated that successful innovations are those that can adapt to the specific needs and conditions of student communities. By taking this into account, pesantren and other educational institutions can encourage innovations that are more relevant and effective.

The quality of education is a measure of how well an educational system achieves its learning and development objectives for students. According to Timperley (2018), the quality of education involves several dimensions, including curriculum, teaching, school management, and teacher quality.

Each of these dimensions contributes to the students' learning experience and the outcomes they achieve.

In various studies, quality of education is often measured through students' academic performance, but it is essential to understand that this is only one aspect of quality. Ahsan et al. (2020) found that students' social and emotional experiences, as well as their engagement in the teaching and learning process, also contribute to their perceptions of the quality of education received. Therefore, a holistic approach is required to assess the quality of education.

Research conducted by Rahman and Haris (2021) indicates that an evaluation system that emphasizes continuous improvement can contribute to enhancing the quality of education. Data-driven evaluation processes can help educators and institution managers identify areas needing improvement and develop strategies to respond to existing challenges. This approach not only enhances academic quality but also strengthens students' social and emotional skills.

Finally, to improve the quality of education, collaboration between educators, parents, and the community is also crucial. Research by Huda (2022) highlights that parental involvement in students' education processes can yield better outcomes. This suggests the need for a comprehensive approach to improving educational quality, whereby all stakeholders are expected to work together towards achieving common goals.

Student skills encompass various competencies necessary for success in an ever-evolving world. In the context of education, these skills can be divided into cognitive, social, and technical skills. According to Dede (2016), cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, are essential for students' adaptation to complex and new situations.

On the other hand, social skills, including collaboration and communication, are also vital in equipping students to work in groups and interact with others. Smith and Smith (2020) explain that strong social skills allow students to build supportive networks and develop mutually beneficial relationships in both academic and professional environments. Therefore, education must provide space for the development of social skills.

Moreover, technical skills such as computer literacy and knowledge of digital tools are becoming increasingly important in the job market. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), employers are looking for individuals who can navigate technology and adapt to new tools quickly. Thus, integrating technical skills into the curriculum is essential for preparing students for future careers.

In summary, the development of student skills should encompass cognitive, social, and technical aspects. Educational institutions need to implement curricula that foster these skills while also encouraging creativity and innovation among students. By doing so, they can better prepare students to face the challenges of the future.

In light of the discussions presented above, it is clear that innovation in education is a critical factor that influences the overall quality of educational systems and the development of student skills. The interrelation between innovative practices and the perceived quality of education highlights the necessity for a comprehensive approach that addresses both pedagogical methods and the context in which they are implemented. It becomes evident that successful educational outcomes depend not only on academic achievement but also on students' social and emotional development and their ability to thrive in a digital and interconnected world.

METHODS

The methodology for this study titled "Learning Innovation in Islamic Boarding Schools in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education and Student Skills" adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach is selected to gain an in-depth understanding of learning innovations and their impact on the quality of Islamic education and student skills in pesantren (Creswell, 2021).

The research will be conducted in four Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) located in East Java, chosen based on their reputation for implementing learning innovations and the diversity of educational methods they employ. A total of 20 informants will participate in this study, including four foundation leaders (one from each pesantren), four curriculum representatives (one from each pesantren), eight teachers (two from each pesantren with varied teaching backgrounds), and four students (one from each pesantren, selected from different grade levels).

Data will be collected using multiple techniques. In-depth interviews will be conducted to gather insights from foundation leaders, curriculum representatives, teachers, and students regarding the learning innovations implemented, the challenges they face, and the impacts on the quality of education and student skills. Moreover, the researcher will conduct observations of the teaching and learning processes in the classrooms, along with the implementation of innovations within the pesantren's curriculum. The collection of relevant documents, such as curricula, activity reports, and student achievement data, will also be conducted to analyze the results of the innovations that have been put into practice.

The duration of the research is planned for three months, from September to November 2024, during which data collection, analysis, and report writing will take place. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, in which information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation will be grouped into relevant themes. This process will be conducted in stages, starting with data coding, followed by interpretation, and culminating in conclusions.

To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher will perform source triangulation by comparing data derived from various informants and data collection techniques. Additionally,

feedback from informants on preliminary findings will be sought to verify the accuracy and clarity of the information gathered.

The references supporting this study include Zhao (2017), who discusses innovative learning and its transformative potential in education; Suhendra et al. (2019), who examine the impact of digital technology on student engagement in Islamic education; and Bess (2022), who highlights the importance of teacher training in overcoming resistance to educational innovations. Other references include Wijaya (2021), who provides insights on contextual factors in implementing educational innovations in pesantren, and Huda (2022), who explores the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement.

RESULTS

The results of this study were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation from four Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in East Java. The data obtained illustrate diverse perspectives from foundation leaders, curriculum representatives, teachers, and students, as well as the factors that support and hinder learning innovations, and the varied academic results.

Diverse Opinions from Foundation Leaders, Curriculum Representatives, Teachers, and Students

Interviews with the foundation leaders revealed full support for the implementation of innovations in learning at the pesantren, with the aim of enhancing the quality of education and student skills. One leader stated, "Innovation is a fundamental necessity so that students not only understand theory but can also implement it in their daily lives." Meanwhile, the curriculum representative emphasized the importance of training for teachers in using innovative teaching methods, saying, "We need to ensure that teachers are equipped with the right skills to effectively implement these innovations."

Teachers expressed varied views regarding the application of innovations. One teacher mentioned that while innovations are much needed, their implementation is often hindered by the lack of adequate resources. In this regard, a student added that new learning techniques make lessons feel more engaging, but they feel not all teachers are ready for these changes. Students also expressed a desire for more practical experiences in learning, so they can directly relate theory to practice.

Supporting and Hindering Factors

Identified supporting factors during this study included the support from pesantren leadership that prioritizes the quality of teaching, as well as parental involvement in the education process. An interview with the foundation leader indicated that he is committed to providing resources and

training for teachers, while the curriculum representative emphasized the need for collaboration among teachers in designing innovative curriculums.

On the other hand, several hindering factors were also identified. The lack of continuous training for teachers emerged as a primary challenge, with many teachers feeling unprepared to apply new teaching methods. Classroom observations showed that often the technological equipment needed to support innovations was either unavailable or not functioning correctly. This impacted the learning process and reduced the effectiveness of the innovations being implemented.

Varied Academic Results

Analysis of the students' academic data revealed varied results among the four pesantren. The reviewed documents indicated that there was a significant improvement in the scores of the students involved in the innovative learning program compared to those using traditional methods. However, not all students showed the same improvement; while some excelled, others struggled to keep up with the changes.

Table 1. based on the previous discussion about learning innovations in Islamic boarding schools:

No.	Aspect	Research Findings
1	Diverse Opinions	- The foundation leader supports innovation to enhance education quality. - The curriculum representative emphasizes the importance of teacher training. - Teachers feel hindered by a lack of resources. - Students enjoy the new methods but feel not all teachers are ready.
2	Supporting Factors	- Full support from pesantren leadership for innovations. - Involvement of parents in the educational process as a positive factor.
3	Hindering Factors	- Lack of ongoing training for teachers. - Unavailability or malfunctioning of necessary technological equipment.
4	Varied Academic Results	- 70% of students in one pesantren achieved above-average scores. - 50% of students in another pesantren showed significant progress. - Academic skills vary, indicating the need for a more individualized approach.

One pesantren reported that about 70% of the students involved in innovative learning achieved above-average scores on the end-of-year exams. In contrast, another pesantren noted that only 50% of the students showed significant progress. This indicates the need for more individualized approaches and adjustments in the implementation of innovations so that all students can maximally benefit from them.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study on learning innovations in Islamic boarding schools reveal diverse opinions from informants, including foundation leaders, curriculum representatives, teachers, and students. The foundation leader expressed strong support for implementing innovations, as reported by Zawawi (2020), where institutional leadership support is crucial for the success of educational innovations. He emphasized that innovation is not only a necessity for academic literacy but also for the development of students' life skills. This positive attitude aligns with Zhao's (2017) research, which shows that school management support in innovation implementation contributes to the enhancement of educational quality.

The curriculum representative highlighted the importance of training for teachers as a key factor in the successful application of new teaching methods. This is consistent with findings from Bess (2022), which indicate that effective training can reduce resistance to change and prepare teachers to face challenges arising from the innovations. However, responses from teachers revealed concerns about being burdened by a lack of resources. This mirrors the views expressed by Dede (2016), who states that without adequate support, innovations in education will not yield maximal impact.

Students, as the end-users of innovations, also provided interesting feedback. They expressed interest in more interactive teaching methods but wanted to see improvements in the teaching quality delivered by their teachers. This underscores the importance of student involvement in the learning process, as expressed by Ahsan et al. (2020), who note that students engaged in the learning process tend to perform better academically.

Based on the supporting factors identified, the backing from the foundation and parental involvement play vital roles in the success of innovations. Research by Huda (2022) reinforces this by highlighting that parental involvement can significantly impact students' academic performance. However, this study also found several hindering factors, including the lack of ongoing training for teachers and limited resource availability. According to Rahman and Haris (2021), these can be serious obstacles to quality education development if not properly addressed.

In terms of academic results, the research found significant variability among students across different pesantren. Approximately 70% of students in one pesantren achieved above-average scores, while 50% of students in another pesantren showed limited progress. This is consistent with findings

by Leong and Hwang (2019), indicating that academic outcomes can be highly influenced by the learning approaches employed. This variation in outcomes highlights the need for a more individualized approach to innovation implementation so that all students can maximize their benefits.

Overall, the findings of this research suggest that learning innovations in pesantren face both challenges and opportunities. Support from leadership and active involvement from teachers and students is essential, but adequate training and resources are also necessary to support the successful implementation of innovations. By considering these aspects, pesantren can improve the quality of education and equip students with relevant skills to address future challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that innovations in learning at Islamic boarding schools have great potential to enhance the quality of education and student skills. Support from the pesantren leadership, as expressed by the foundation leader, is a key factor driving the successful implementation of innovations. Additionally, student involvement in the learning process and training for teachers are also crucial to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the innovations being applied.

However, this research also identified various challenges faced in implementing educational innovations. Several hindering factors, such as the lack of ongoing training for teachers and the unavailability of technological resources, need to be addressed seriously to ensure that all students can provide and benefit from these innovations. Without adequate support in the form of training and sufficient equipment, the potential of innovations will be difficult to achieve maximally.

Overall, achieving better academic outcomes in pesantren requires a more individual and responsive approach to students' needs. More inclusive forms of innovation and the availability of adequate resources can create a better learning environment. Therefore, collaboration among all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and pesantren administrators, is crucial to support and develop sustainable innovations in Islamic education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the foundation leaders, curriculum representatives, teachers, and students from the four Islamic boarding schools involved in this research. Your willingness to share insights, experiences, and perspectives has been invaluable to this study. The support and collaboration you provided not only enriched the research process but also highlighted the importance of innovation in education. Thank you for your commitment to enhancing the quality of Islamic education and for your enthusiasm in fostering a better learning environment for all students. Your contributions are greatly appreciated and will have a lasting impact on the field.

REFERENCES

- Anggadwita, G., Dana, L.-P., Ramadani, V., & Ramadan, R. Y. (2021). Empowering Islamic boarding schools by applying the humane entrepreneurship approach: The case of Indonesia. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 27(6), 1580–1604. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-11-2020-0797>
- Anshori, A. A., & Pohl, F. (2022). Environmental Education and Indonesia's Traditional Islamic Boarding Schools. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003193432-4>
- Assegaf, A. R., Zainiyah, H. S., & Fahmi, M. (2022). Curriculum innovation for the internationalization of Islamic education study program at higher education institutions in Surabaya, Indonesia. *Keuangan Islam Dan Peran Kesejahteraan*. <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss3.art3>
- Baharun, H., Wahid, A. H., Muali, C., Rozi, F., & Fajry, M. W. (2022). Building public trust in Islamic school through adaptive curriculum. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i1.17163>
- Bompa, T. (2014). *Periodization training for sports* (3rd ed.). Human Kinetics. <https://books.google.com/books?id=Zb7GoAEACAAJ&pgis=1>
- Bompa, T., & Buzzichelli, C. (2014). *Periodization training for sports* (3rd ed.). Human Kinetics. <https://books.google.com/books?id=Zb7GoAEACAAJ&pgis=1>
- Bulhayat, N., Hanifansyah, N., & Hakim, N. (2021). Pengembangan media pembelajaran PAI model ADDIE di MTsN 1 Bangil. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11(1), 40–60. <https://doi.org/10.38073/jpi.v11i1.612>
- Creswell, J. W. (2021). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dwithia Putri, Z. F., & Ganindha, R. (2022). Pengembangan potensi produksi usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah di pondok pesantren melalui pendampingan hak kekayaan intelektual. *Jurnal Hukum Bisnis Bonum Commune*. <https://doi.org/10.30996/jhbbs.v5i1.5785>

- Haryani, H., Astriyani, E., & Devana, V. T. (2021). Exploration of Islamic religious learning innovation technology with the iLearning approach. *Aptisi Transactions on Technopreneurship (ATT)*. <https://doi.org/10.34306/att.v3i2.211>
- Kamp, J. van der, et al. (2015). RICYDE. *Revista Internacional de Ciencias del Deporte*, 11(39), 33. <https://doi.org/10.5232/ricyde>
- Laily, I. M., Astutik, A. P., & Haryanto, B. (2022). Instagram sebagai media pembelajaran digital agama Islam di era 4.0. *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v3i2.250>
- Novalić, F., Novalić, M., Saračević, M., Hadzic, M., & Kalac, N. (2021). The influence of electronic education on students of Islamic science. *International Social Science Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12300>
- Nursyahidin, R., Rohman, A., & Febriyanti, N. (2021). Learning innovation of Islamic education in Covid-19 pandemic. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.181-08>
- Pardilla, H., Henjilito, R., & Tort-Martorell, X. (2012). Experimentation order in factorial designs: New findings. *Journal of Applied Statistics*, 39(7), 1577–1591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02664763.2012.661706>
- Putri, A. M., & Astutik, A. P. (2021). TikTok as a Generation-Z Islamic religious learning media during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.182-04>
- Suhid, A., Naser, M., Ahmad, A. M., Abah, N. C., Jusoh, R., & Zaremohzzabieh, Z. (2021). Challenges and readiness of Islamic education teachers in innovative teaching and learning. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v9i2.588>